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AND *CONNECT THE DOTS*

RASHMI BANSAL

**ARVIND
KEJRIWAL**

INTO THAT HEAVEN OF FREEDOM

EXTRACTED FROM *I HAVE A DREAM*



**INTO THAT HEAVEN
OF FREEDOM**

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OF FREEDOM**

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Into That Heaven of Freedom

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*“... Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.”*

– Rabindranath Tagore
(from WHERE THE MIND IS WITHOUT FEAR)

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I met Arvind Kejriwal on the 7 December 2009, to interview him for my book *I Have a Dream*, on inspiring social entrepreneurs.

This was before the Lokpal agitation, before the Aam Aadmi Party. Yet, I thought the man was fascinating. Why would an IIT graduate leave everything and become an RTI Activist?

A friend of mine who knows Arvind from his Tata Steel days vouched for his integrity and sincerity. I also knew that the work Arvind Kejriwal was doing had won him the prestigious Magsaysay Award in the year 2006. The award citation reads:

Thirty-eight-year-old Kejriwal reminds Indians that the boons of collective action, such as the honest delivery of services, have already been paid for through taxes. Citizens are entitled to them....

...In electing Arvind Kejriwal to receive the 2006 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Emergent Leadership, the board of trustees recognizes his activating India's right-to-information movement at the grassroots, empowering New Delhi's poorest citizens to fight corruption by holding government answerable to the people.

Bande mein kuch toh hai, I felt. (This person is worth meeting).

One of the themes of my book was 'changemakers'. The idea that a single individual is all it takes to start a movement. To define it more clearly: "While the world laments 'what is', the changemaker takes a small step towards making it as it should be."

Arvind Kejriwal certainly fit that description and so, at 8 o'clock on a cold December morning, I found myself at A-119, Kaushambi, Ghaziabad. A modest middle class home in a suburb of Delhi.

Over tea and breakfast, Arvind Kejriwal shared his story. He wore his trademark green sweater and a gentle smile, even as he narrated a tale of 10 tough years, taking on the system.

When I see him on television today, he is exactly the same. He speaks from the heart and he acts with his head. And he has been doing that consistently, since the year 2000.

In his book, *Outliers: The Secret of Success*, author Malcolm Gladwell talks

about the ‘10,000 hour rule’. The rule states that in order to do something extraordinary in any field – be it sports, or business, or science – you must put in 10,000 hours of passion and devotion. What’s more, you must do it selflessly.

Between 2000 and 2011, Arvind Kejriwal has put in his 10,000 hours in public service. And it is reflected in the extraordinary debut of the Aam Aadmi Party in Indian politics.

An entrepreneur is one who chooses to solve old problems in new ways. The audacity of Arvind Kejriwal is that he chose the biggest problem he could see – the chalta hai attitude of this country.

People call him an ‘idealist’ and make it sound like a bad word. The fact is that only with idealism can you embark on such a perilous journey. And keep getting up, each time you are knocked down.

Arvind Kejriwal tried to address the issues that affect the aam aadmi, through various interventions – including RTI. But at some point he realised it was like emptying the ocean, one teaspoon at a time. It was time to ‘scale up’, to think big and create an impact.

But the basic principle remains the same: a people’s movement built on participation – not money power.

Each time I hear Arvind Kejriwal declare something ‘new’ and unheard of in politics, I think –it’s not a plan he hatched yesterday.

When I met him 4 years ago, he had clarity in his mind about the concept of true democracy, which he called ‘Swaraj’.

“If you were travelling in a bus, what kind of a pamphlet would inspire you to join this Swaraj?” he asked me.

Ultimately, it wasn’t pamphlets but an anshan (indefinite fast) by Anna at the Ramlila ground, which set that ball rolling.

Like millions of ‘mango people’ I am a silent supporter of the Aam Aadmi Party. And I salute the ‘changemaker’ who believed the impossible is possible.

Let’s open our mind to new possibilities.

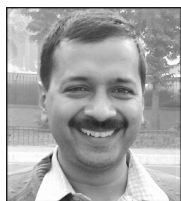
Jai Hind.

December 2013
Mumbai

Rashmi Bansal

CHANGEMAKERS

A single person is all it takes to start a movement. While the world laments 'what is', the changemaker takes a small step towards making it as it should be.



INTO THAT HEAVEN OF FREEDOM

**Arvind Kejriwal,
Parivartan**

As an IRS officer, Arvind Kejriwal waged a secret war against his own department. This campaign – under the banner ‘Parivartan’ – later pioneered the use of RTI (Right to Information Act) to empower citizens. Arvind’s dream is to see ‘true democracy’, where ordinary people regain the right to govern themselves.

Arvind Kejriwal has a smooth, unlined forehead. Which is a miracle, for a man who’s been banging his head against the wall – for years.

Even a casual conversation about ‘corruption’, ‘politicians’ or the ‘state of the nation’ can depress the best among us. Things appear so hopeless, so grim.

But Arvind is made of sterner stuff. For the past ten years, he has waged a battle against various elements of the ‘system’. His efforts have made a few dents, brought some small change – but there is a long long way to go.

Yet, he is cheerful. And certainly not cynical.

“The real issue is not corruption – that is only a symptom. What we need to work on is building democracy, in the real and honest sense of the term.”

Which is what he is doing, through ‘Parivartan’. Using the hammer of RTI and the nail of ‘accountability’, Arvind has created a movement.

But he needs more hands, to hit these nails into more walls. To put ‘what must be’ in place of what is.

So that into that heaven of freedom, may this country awake.
Amen.

INTO THAT HEAVEN OF FREEDOM

Arvind Kejriwal,
Parivartan

Arvind Kejriwal was born in a village called Sivani in Hissar district of Haryana.

“My father was an electrical engineer. He kept changing jobs so I attended many different schools. But finally, he settled down with Jindal Strips Ltd, so from 8th class onwards I studied in Hissar.”

A topper where academics was concerned, but zero in sports, Arvind's initial inclination was towards medicine.

“Till 10th class the desire to become a doctor was very strong. At the back of my mind I always had this element of wanting to ‘serve the people’.”

But a senior explained that ‘whatever you do, you must do it in the best institutes’. But, seats at AIIMS are limited. Why not try for engineering instead?

That's how Arvind ended up joining IIT Kharagpur. And, after completing his Mechanical Engineering degree in 1989, he joined Tata Steel.

“I worked with Tata Steel for three years, and somewhere in this period I took the Civil Service exam.”

In his first attempt, Arvind made it to the IRS (Indian Revenue Service). Keen to get into IAS, he took the exam again and got through the ‘writtens’.

At this time, he went to the HR department at Tata Steel and asked for a transfer to the social welfare department.

They said, “That's not possible.”

So Arvind quit and joined Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity.

Why the sudden desire to take up social service? “I have no clue,” he says.

The UPSC results were due in March. Arvind spent the next four

months with Christian missionaries in the tribal areas in Bodoland. He then spent some time with the Ramakrishna Mission.

Then, the interview call came and Arvind went back home – to Haryana. But, he went and visited several villages and also did some work with the ‘Nehru Yuva Kendra’.

“This period was more of learning. I would go to various organisations and see what kind of work they were doing. Several questions came up in my mind at that time, but then I got through the interview and once again got into the IRS.” This time he joined, and the ‘journey’ came to an end. Working with the IRS – or Income Tax department as it is commonly known – was routine.

“I enjoyed working. People say that if you are honest, you are victimised. But I was never victimised. I got some of the best postings and I never faced any interference in my work. Neither was I ever asked to do ‘wrong things’.”

But at the back of his mind, the questions remained.

The Archbishop of Delhi had once said, “The biggest problem of our country is not Harshad Mehta stealing ₹ 3000 crores. It is when an ordinary person pays 200 rupees as bribe – and thinks it’s okay.” That impacts the psyche of the entire country. But what can be done about it? This is something Arvind often pondered on.

“A person wanting to lead an honest life does not have that option in this country. Can we provide him that option?”

After much thought and discussion, Arvind decided that telling people ‘don’t pay a bribe’ was not enough. Someone had to provide an alternative.

“Let us start telling people that if a government official asks for a bribe, don’t pay. We will pursue your case and get the work done for free of cost.”

“While taking the IAS exams you feel ‘I can make a difference’. Only when you actually join this service do you realise that’s not going to happen.”

It was essentially some like-minded people who came together under the banner 'Parivartan'.

"We started with the income tax department only and it worked very well."

At the time Arvind was still working with the Income Tax department – and yet, in a sense, working against it. Naturally, no one but his close family and friends knew about his involvement with the cause. The first thing Parivartan did was meet with the Commissioner in Delhi.

"We will bring to you cases where bribes are being asked for," they said.

The Commissioner said, "I will support you."

Parivartan then put up banners and hoardings in Delhi exhorting the *aam aadmi* to approach this forum, if anyone from the I-T department is asking you for a bribe.

"The moment these banners came up, the authorities decided we were painting them in a bad light. So they disowned us and, in public, the chief commissioner said that some disgruntled CAs and touts are behind this campaign – under the garb of 'Parivartan'."

Yet, a lot of cases did come. Parivartan would submit these cases, collectively, to the income tax authorities. As well as send the list of pending cases to members of Parliament, the Finance Minister, media and so on.

"For example, *Financial Express* did a half page story on all the cases that were with us, asking why the people were not getting their refunds."

This put tremendous pressure on the department and as a result, cases going through Parivartan were cleared in no time. "But overall, there was no change in the practice of the department."

The Parivartan campaign kicked off in January 2000. By August, Arvind felt that the scope of their efforts should be widened. He decided to take up an issue affecting all sections of the society. That issue was electricity.

"In August 2000, we started the same exercise with the Delhi Vidyut Board. We asked people not to pay bribes but come to us, instead. Parivartan will take up your case, free of cost."

The Chairman of DVB – Jagdish Sagar – was very co-operative. He appointed a special executive engineer in his office and said that whatever grievance cases come through Parivartan should be attended to immediately.

As part of the campaign, members of Parivartan – including Arvind – would sit outside the entrance of Delhi Vidyut board, distributing pamphlets. On one such occasion, an erstwhile colleague from Tata Steel came up to him and said, “What are you doing here?”

Thinking that Arvind had fallen on hard times, he added, “If you want, I can talk to Tata Steel and they will take you back!” Another time, a senior from the Income tax department caught him distributing pamphlets at Nehru Place.

But none of this deterred the double life of ‘Officer Arvind, Citizen Kejriwal’.

“In end of 2000 I took study leave and till November 2001, we kept doing these activities.”

But by the end of two years, Arvind started wondering, “How long are we going to do this?”

Tackling two departments in one city, Parivartan had its hands completely full. Yes, the effort was working, especially with the Vidyut Board.

“At one time there were more than 50 cases pending before the ‘Bijli Adalat’ every month. After we came in, the number came down to 3 or 4 cases a month.”

But, how many people could Parivartan serve like this? How many departments could one organisation cover, how many officials could they meet?

**“Parivartan is not a registered NGO.
You don’t have to register, actually,
to do social work.”**

“I realised that we are not empowering people. We have also become middlemen, only unlike touts we don’t take money.”

The *system* was not shaken, in any way.

Even as Arvind wrestled with these issues, the government passed the RTI Act in Delhi, in December 2001.

“We got a copy of the Act and found it to be a very powerful instrument. But, no one knew about it!”

The Act states that every department will have an Officer declared as a ‘Competent Authority’. Any citizen can submit an application seeking information related to that department. And the department would have to reply within a stipulated period of time.

Arvind decided to test if this worked, by sending applications to DSIDC (Delhi State Industrial Development Corporation), DVB (Delhi Vidyut Board) and MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi).

“In all these departments the Officers did not know who the ‘Competent Authority’ was. In fact, they were not even aware that such an Act had been passed in the Delhi legislature!”

Parivartan gave the officials copies of the Act. Nothing happened. So, they wrote to the Chief Minister and in January 2002, the CM held a meeting with officers of various government departments. Sheila Dikshit said, “RTI is law, and it must be implemented.”

The following month one Ashok Gupta of Lakshmi Nagar, came to Parivartan with a grievance. He had applied for an electricity connection about 2 years ago. He was being asked to pay a bribe of ₹ 5000.

“Earlier we used to accept such cases. But this time, we drafted an RTI application and asked him to go and submit it.”

10 days after he submitted his query, an officer from the Vidyut Board came to his house and said, “The connection is sanctioned.”

This was surprising, to say the least. Because even cases routed through Parivartan usually took around 2 months to get resolved.

“From then on, we stopped accepting grievance cases. When anyone approached us we helped fill out the RTI application and submit it. And this way, their problems were quickly solved.”

In the next 3 months, Parivartan helped to file over 200 applications. And all cases – many of them pending for years – were resolved in 15 to 20 days.

“We decided to use RTI in other government departments. ‘If you have any legitimate work use RTI – it works better than bribery’. This was our message to people.”

In March 2002, Arvind read about Aruna Roy and the jansunwaai ‘social audit’ she had undertaken in Beawar (Rajasthan). He went to meet her and understand the work of MKSS (Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan).

MKSS was using RTI to battle corruption at the panchayat level. Much of the funds allotted under various government schemes were actually going to babus and middlemen. False entries in muster rolls were a common occurrence in employment guarantee schemes. Public works existed only on paper, but money was recorded as ‘spent’.

“MKSS collected information from the panchayat and then, they would hold a public meeting. Villagers were present, the authorities were also present. People would then testify whether work had actually been done or not.”

Arvind realised this was an extremely powerful exercise. He decided to implement the idea in Delhi.

“We have our office in Sundar Nagari, which is a slum area. We decided to file an RTI application to get records related to work carried out by various departments in Sunder Nagari, and neighbouring Seemapuri.”

This exercise took much longer than usual.

“It is a huge mafia, jobs were at stake. So they did not give it easily. But we kept pursuing the matter and finally, got information regarding 182 contracts.”

“We can ask people to come to us and cases will be resolved. But as soon as we move out of the scene, the malpractices start again. This was a big worry!”

Parivartan distributed this information block-wise and street-wise. Locality by locality, they beat drums, collected people, and held a public meeting.

They said, “MCD claims ₹ 2 crores was spent on the road in front of your house. ₹ 50 lakhs were spent on toilets.”

The people came out and protested, “This is all a big fraud, no such work was done here!”

There was a lot of anger, lot of mobilisation. Parivartan then arranged for a *jansunwaai* where contracts were read out in the presence of authorities and the local MLA.

Ultimately it was found that of ₹ 1.3 crores allotted towards 64 contracts, items worth ₹ 70 lakhs were missing. 29 electric motors were shown as ‘paid for’, not a single one had been installed. 29 hand pumps were supposed to be paid for – of them, 15 were missing.

There were several roads which existed only on paper. “We verified each and every contract in this way. After this, we prepared a very detailed report which showed each and every item paid for, checking if they were all installed or not. We gave copies of the report to the Chief Minister and MCD Commissioner.”

Wonderful, but no action was taken. No one was suspended. An order or two was half-heartedly passed. But ‘systemic change’ remained, only on paper.

“Our first suggestion was that anytime a new project is to be implemented, it should be put up on a public notice board. An order to that effect was passed but never actually implemented.”

Parivartan decided to file a PIL in the Delhi High Court, asking for action to be taken. Under the court’s directions, an FIR was registered. The case is being fought in the district court – for the past 8 years.

“Nothing has come out of it.”

Frustrating, for sure. But Parivartan continued its efforts. A lot energy had been generated in Sunder Nagari. People now came to Parivartan saying, “We are concerned about the overflowing *nallahs*, but first we need food to eat.”

So it was that Parivartan decided to take up the issue of PDS. Commonly known as *ration ki dukaan*.

“We had a case where a very poor woman called Triveni – with monthly income of ₹ 400-500 per month – was unable to get ration.

The shop would either be closed, or did not have stock.”

This, despite Triveni having an *Antyodaya* – or ‘poorest of poor’ – ration card.

Parivartan helped her file an RTI application. The application asked for copies of the cash memos issued in Triveni’s name over the last 3 months.

“After one month she got a reply saying that 25 kg of wheat and 10 kg of rice had been given per month. Of course all this was fake information!”

But before any action could be taken, the shopkeeper approached her. He apologised and promised to supply ration every month – so that was that.

Arvind decided that if one family could get its due, why not the entire locality? Parivartan requested all 17 ration shops in the Seemapuri area for their food distribution records over the past 6 months.

“That’s when the authorities got together. They knew that if this information leaked out, there will be *hungama*.”

They said, “These records cannot be given to you as they are the property of the shop keepers. The government has no control over them.”

Parivartan filed an appeal and won it. Then, the shopkeepers went to the High Court and got a stay order against them.

“At one point of time there were 132 stay orders against us in Delhi.” Eventually, the court lifted the stay orders and records were verified. But, Parivartan workers were badly beaten up.

“A girl’s throat was slit; our records were burnt. There was lots of *tamasha*. The Food Commissioner of Delhi was transferred out...” Subsequently, the people of Sunder Nagari boycotted the ration shops and finally, the Delhi Government made some changes in the system.

Now, for the ration department, there is no need to file an RTI. Any Saturday, you can walk in between 2 pm and 5 pm and the records will be shown to you.

If there is a discrepancy, then the shop will be cancelled on the spot. “When this order was first passed the Food Commissioners were very helpful and a lot of ration shops were closed down. But over time the

department office itself became a battleground.”

A mob of 300-400 shopkeepers would gather outside and prevent people from going to verify their records. The few who managed to get in were beaten up when they came out.

“Again, I must admit, in some areas people are getting ration. But I don’t think on a systemic level there has been a big change.” But, every failure or ‘half-success’ only led Arvind to push harder. To find better, more workable solutions.

Next, Parivartan decided to take up the issue of ‘water privatisation’. “In November 2004, I read a newspaper article about the Delhi Government’s decision to privatise water. Several NGOs were opposing this move, so we decided to find out more.”

Parivartan filed an RTI application asking for copies of all records related to this project. After 6 months, they got copies of about 10,000 documents.

“This was a World Bank funded project going on in complete secrecy, for the last 6 years. We studied this project and realised that if implemented, it would be a disaster. And this was not just our finding.”

Parivartan sent these documents to IIM Ahmedabad and IIM Bangalore. 35 professors from IIMB and 15 professors from IIMA wrote to the Prime Minister, asking him to cancel the project.

“There was a lot of uproar. We distributed a large number of two page pamphlets all over Delhi saying that ‘your water was at stake’. Finally, the Delhi Government withdrew its loan application from the World Bank.

“Now all these things – water privatisation, corruption, bribery, PDS – it got us thinking. There are so many sectors, so many problems, and in each case RTI is a powerful tool. But the battle cannot be fought by one Parivartan!”

Arvind decided to enlist foot soldiers to the cause. To make the mission a *movement*.

In 2006, Parivartan launched a campaign titled ‘Drive against bribe’. This campaign aggressively promoted a single thought: “Don’t pay bribe, use RTI to get what is due to you.”

“We contacted NGOs from across the country and enlisted their

support. 1500 volunteers were trained and there were also 8 media houses including NDTV, *Hindustan Times*, *The Hindu* and regional papers who came in as media partners.”

From July 1-15, 2006, these volunteers set up help centres in 55 cities across India and helped people in filing RTI petitions.

“In 15 days, 22,000 RTI applications were filed. We had several success stories – typically work pending for months and even years was done in 3-4 days flat!”

The experience was an eye-opener, in more ways than one. Parivartan is not even a ‘registered’ NGO, so it is not funded by any corporate or developmental agency. People often expressed doubts whether such an organisation could ‘scale up’.

But lack of money – far from being a hindrance – actually helped mobilise support.

For instance, when Parivartan met with NGOs, the first question they would ask was, “Where will the money come from?”

“We can ask people to come to us and cases will be resolved. But as soon as we move out of the scene, the malpractices start again. This was a big worry!”

Arvind’s response was simple, “*Aapka sheher hai, aapka desh hai, aapki ladaai hai... aapko hi sab kuch karna hai.*”

And the NGOs raised their own funds.

Similarly, media houses gave free advertisements, in support of a good cause.

“One day we calculated – so many cities, so many people, so many volunteers – the ‘budget’ would have easily exceeded ■ 15-20 crore rupees.”

What Parivartan actually spent was ■ 80,000.

“The other thing we ensured was that Parivartan remained completely in the background. It was *everyone’s* campaign.”

And even as an ongoing effort, that remains the philosophy.

Parivartan operates with just 4 full-time staff and total monthly

overheads of ₹ 40,000. That money comes from individual donors.

“Logon ke chalne se chalta hai,” is how Arvind likes to put it.

2006 was a watershed in more ways than one. It was the year that Arvind finally quit the IRS. After taking study leave, unpaid leave, and special leave, he formally resigned in February 2006.

It was also the year that Arvind received the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Emergent Leadership. A recognition of his commitment to the cause, and a chance to take the effort to the next level.

“With water privatisation, it was more of an ad hoc kind of reaction to a particular problem. I felt we need a system in place where we can study the various governance systems on an ongoing basis.”

Thus Arvind set up an office called ‘Public Cause Research Foundation’ (PCRF), using the Magsaysay award money as seed capital. Apart from research the Foundation had instituted ‘RTI Awards’ to honour individuals, commissioners and officers who are doing extraordinary work in Right To Information.

“We studied 52,000 orders passed by 104 information commissioners in the country and ranked all of them.” Naturally, this created a controversy of sorts.

“But the rating is only on the basis of their orders,” he shrugs.

The RTI Awards themselves are funded by Narayana Murthy and the Tata Trust.

RTI was no doubt a stupendous tool, and it could be and should be put to excellent use. But the larger question remained.

“Wherever, you go, there are various problems. *Bijli, paani, sadak...* But the common thread in all these issues was lack of governance.”

This ‘democracy’ – which we are so proud of – is actually a farce. “The trouble is, you go out and vote once in 5 years. After that, as a citizen, you have absolutely no say in governance. *Koi aapko poochta nahin!*”

Over the last couple of years, PCRF has been researching this subject. What kind of governance system do other countries have? What kind of governance systems existed in ancient or medieval India? And what comes out is quite fantastic.

“We believe democracy is a modern concept, but democracy has existed in India since Buddha’s time,” exclaims Arvind. In fact, Vaishali

was the first 'republic' in the world.

"When I say republic, the first thing that comes to your mind is elections. But elections are not democracy. We have equated elections with democracy."

In Buddha's time, in Vaishali, there were no elections. The king's son became the next king but, these kings had little or no say in important matters. Almost all decisions were taken in *gram sabhas* or public meetings.

"If I tell you *desh mein do hazaar crore ka ghotala ho gaya*, it's just a story. But if I tell you the kachcha road outside your house has been 'made' last year, as per municipal records, then your blood boils."

"Some people work in education, others are opening hospitals; I ask that all people work toward making us a real democracy. Everything else will fall into place."

This system of governance continued to be in force till 1860, when it was dismantled by the British and replaced by the 'collector system'.

"All the powers that the people enjoyed earlier, were invested in the collector now. Each part of a person's life was departmentalised; education department, health department, irrigation department and so on."

Unfortunately, at the time of Independence, we did not change the system. We just replaced the British collector with an Indian collector!

"When you study other countries – the US, for instance – at the local or county level, all decisions are taken by the public. You have regular town hall meetings where you can decide on things which affect your life."

And hold your elected officials responsible.

“I don’t think our government asks citizens these things *anywhere* in our country!”

When Parivartan met Sheila Dixit, she said, “The people want water privatisation.”

Arvind countered, “People don’t.”

So who decides whether the people want it or not?

“If you have *mohalla sabhas* all over Delhi i.e. you divide the city into small-small parts and people meet on a monthly basis, they can decide whether they want water privatisation or not.”

And the collective voice of these *mohalla sabhas* becomes the voice of the people.

“This is the kind of democracy we envision – we call it *Swaraj*.

This is what Gandhiji talked about; that this country would be a federation of six lakh villages, every village a ‘republic’ unto itself.”

So while RTI work continues, Swaraj is taking more and more of Parivartan’s time and attention. In Delhi, the concept of Swaraj is actually being implemented, on an experimental basis.

“We spoke to some councillors, good people, who liked the idea and agreed to try it in their area. We have divided one ward of 40,000 people into ten parts. Each part is called a *mohalla*, and consists of approximately 4000 voters.”

The first *mohalla* meets on the first Saturday; the second on the next Saturday and so on. This way you reach out to 40,000 people over ten weeks.

Before the meeting the councillor writes a personal letter to each family stating that there are things to be decided and we would like to know your opinion.

“Aap aaye aur mujhe bataiye kya karna hai.”

At a typical meeting, around 150 people turn up. The councillor brings with him local officers such as the sanitary inspector, horticulture inspector, water inspector, electricity inspector. Each officer shares the budget allocated to him; people vote and prioritise on what things the money should be spent on.

“This has been started in two areas – in Trilokpuri and Sundar Nagari.

Now we want to accelerate it and implement it elsewhere!

The results have been fantastic. People now have a voice. “If you come to the meetings, you would see that often a project gets sanctioned on the spot!”

It has also been an eye-opener for the councillors. In Sundar Nagari, the councillor said he had a budget of ₹ 70 lakhs. “*Usme to kuch ho nahin sakta*,” he sighed.

Then people asked the junior engineer, “*Aapka kitna budget hai.*”

He said, “*Bahut hai. Aap batao kya karna hai...*”

The ‘budget’ is apparently, enough to get all roads in the entire mohalla made *pakka*. If the contractor lays it thick on the roads – not his own pocket.

“You see, people’s demands are actually not even that many!” exults Arvind.

Someone wants the streetlight on his road fixed – the bulb costs ₹ 3000. Someone asks you to fill up a pothole – that costs ₹ 20,000. So a budget of ₹ 12-14 lakhs is usually sufficient to take care of *everything*. And yet!

“Now, the *mohalla sabhas* are monitoring everything. No payment is made to contractors unless the people vouch that the work is satisfactory.”

And finally, at *mohalla sabhas*, the community decides who should benefit from the various government schemes for the poor. One such scheme provides ₹ 1000 per month per family – an attractive sum for any slumdweller.

But, in a gathering of 200 such, not one hand went up. Everyone pointed to one woman and said, “She is the poorest, give her the money.”

“You have to be very needy to stand up and say, ‘I need money’ in front of your entire community. *Sab ko apni izzat pyaari hai – koi bheekh nahin maangna chahta!*”

People are basically decent – and this decency can be harnessed. “Our ultimate dream is that the whole of Delhi would be run by *mohalla sabhas*. The people should decide what laws get passed in the Assembly.”

But first, we need a law which institutionalises *mohalla sabhas*. In the meanwhile, Parivartan is selling the concept to councillors, and to citizens.

Councillors are slowly coming on board – two in Tigri Khanpur, five in Jahangirpuri...

“Unko vote nazar aa rahe hain.”

But, it's a double-edged sword. Once you are a known face, and accountable to your people, you have to deliver. *Phir dhandha paani kahan se aayega?*

“Let's see, it is very interesting. The day 30 or 40 councillors are ready to implement this scheme I know *mohalla sabhas* will come under attack. How and when, only time will tell. But then it depends how stiffly people resist and stand up for their rights.”

Put this way, the future looks a bit bleak. Struggle, strife, even danger to one's life...

“You know when that girl's throat was slit, it was a difficult moment for us. We thought about what we were doing and why, where are we going, will it even bring any result?”

It was the girl herself who provided the answer. She was under tremendous pressure from her family to leave Parivartan, get married and settle down. But *she* questioned them instead.

“Agar main nahin karoongi to kaun karega. Koi Amrika se aakar to hamare desh ko sudhaarne wala nahin.”

And that kept everyone else's resolve.

“You have to accept all this – it's part of the battle.”

While there is the option of legal recourse, Arvind is well aware how futile that can be.

“Whenever there has been an attack on us, we file a case so it goes on record. But we leave it at that.”

Because pursuing the matter would only mean spending your life running from one courtroom to the next.

“Also, if we are to go about seeking punishment for everyone, it would not serve our purpose. That's because the people who attack us are just pawns of the system. By giving them punishment, the *system* will

not improve.”

Bold words, inspiring words, but just for a moment I pause and think about how he is managing it all. Does revolution run only on love and fresh air?

“Like I said the movement is funded by people. I myself get a fellowship from AID (Association for India’s Development).”

And then, there is the silent support of his family.

“My wife is with the IRS. And no, what I do has not affected her career...” Yet, it could not have been easy.

“Initially, there was a lot of opposition, now they have accepted it. If you look at it from their perspective, I did give them a shock.”

Just like he is doing, to the system. The voltage is not enough – yet. But *andhere se ujaale ki taraf ka safar shuru ho gaya hai...* More power to the people.

ADVICE TO YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

The first and foremost thing is that you need to think. Yes, corruption is a problem; but don't just jump on that one point. Many issues are inter-linked.

Secondly, most of us think, 'I am an individual and I have a family'. And we would do anything for that family. But we don't have that same feeling for the country.

Now take for instance, when we had that 'cash for votes' scandal. MPs were sold. I thought that was the most shocking thing in Indian democracy.

I told many of my friends, "Let's go to India Gate and protest." They replied, "*Jaane se kya hoga, kuch hota to hai nahin.*"

I felt that even if 'nothing happens' if we keep quiet, things will slide further. At least some people would join in the protest and our voice would be heard.

When we go to see a movie, then do we ask, would there be any benefit in watching this movie?

So as we take responsibility for our families' welfare, in the same way, we need to think about our country's welfare. We have to think and there is no other option as democracy cannot work without active participation of the people. Otherwise it will collapse and it is collapsing.

In order for a democracy to work, *kuch hota hai ki nahin hum logon ko participate to karna padega.*

I am not telling you to join Parivartan. I am not saying participate in anything and everything. Make your choices, but participate in something. Something which attracts you, motivates you, inspires you.

IN CONVERSATION WITH ARVIND KEJRIWAL

In the interest of focus and readability, I did not include many thoughts and ideas Arvind expressed to me in the original interview. But given his new avatar as a political leader, I think they are relevant. Whether you vehemently oppose Aam Aadmi Party or support it, you will get some insight into its thought-process.

Here are the unpublished excerpts from our 1 hr 50 minute long conversation.

On why he joined the Administrative Service

Arvind Kejriwal: I think one purpose for giving these exams is that you want to make a difference. Only when you actually join the services you realise that you can't make much of a difference.

Corruption and the aam aadmi

AK: This was always there at the back of my mind, and especially when I once heard our Bishop, in Delhi, saying that the biggest problem of our country is not when Harshad Mehta stole ₹ 3000 crore ... It's when an ordinary person is required to pay ₹ 200-300 as bribe... that really pinches me because this extortionist bribery is affecting every single individual in this country.

If every person is asked for a bribe and we feel that there is nothing wrong, then it becomes the psyche of the whole country that there is nothing wrong in giving and taking bribes. This is what affects me a lot and we have to do something about it.

See, if there is a person who has not done anything wrong, he has submitted all the necessary papers...still he is asked to pay a bribe, why? If a person wants to lead an honest life, he does not have that option in this country...

If he says, I want to do the right things and not the wrong ones, but still I do not want to suffer because of that, can we provide him the option for that? When some of my colleagues and I discussed this matter, we said that instead of telling people not to pay bribes, let us

start providing some alternatives to them. Let us start telling people that if they have done their jobs right, and are asked to pay a bribe, then don't pay a bribe, instead ask them to give the case to us.

We will pursue your case and get the work done free of cost. We started this in the Income Tax department (in the year 2000).

On taking risk

AK: I was in the Income Tax department and was working against the department. I was totally in the background and the friends who were with us were the face of Parivartan. They were not full-time, they were normal working people (but not in a government job).

No one knew, for two years no one knew. Otherwise I would have been thrown out. Later on when I came in the forefront I pretended that that Parivartan was different from this Parivartan.

On change of strategy

AK: In January 2000, I started this and by August we started to realise that the Income Tax department or income tax payees are not the right kind of people who need our services. Because even among them there were people who have done a lot of wrong things, so why to serve them. So we wanted to take up an issue that affects all sections of the society. At that time electricity was a big issue, even very poor people had to pay bribes to the Board. So in August 2000, we started the same exercise with the Delhi Vidyut Board.

On study leave

AK: I took study leave and it is during this period that I would go and stand outside those (Delhi Vidyut Board) offices. It was not possible to bunk the office from 11 o'clock to 1 o'clock every day.

When I took study leave I had mentioned that I would be studying about corruption in two departments and give suggestions. So in any case we were tackling corruption in Income Tax and Delhi Vidyut Board and whatever data we got could have gone into that study. So it wasn't a formal study period.

On funding this exercise

AK: I took some money from my uncle and my brothers – about ₹ 70-80,000. We put up banners and posters (it was legal at that time).

On soul-searching

AK: We can ask people to come to us and cases will be resolved as long as we are there. But as soon as we move out of the scene, the malpractices are going to be back again. So we were worried about this. (Subsequently, Parivartan discovered the RTI Act).

On systemic change

AK: We gave copies (of the Seemapuri Slum audit report) to the Chief Minister and MCD Commissioner. No action was taken, no one was suspended. We suggested some systemic changes to be made. But they were just implemented on paper...all these failures have led to what we are doing presently.

On the fight against water privatisation (2004)

This was a World Bank funded project which was going on in complete secrecy for 6 years. This included the World Bank documents, their consultants' trips, who was consulted then, their reports, the bidding documents, all correspondence, everything was there. (After 6 months, Parivartan succeeded in getting 10,000 pages of documents and concluded the project would be a disaster, if implemented).

Barring very stray cases, water privatisation has never been successful anywhere in the world. Wherever water privatisation talk came up, like in Bolivia and Venezuela, there have been riots and many people have lost their lives. And finally the governments had to withdraw the project.

On funding Parivartan

AK: We were non-funded. It was supposed to be a people's movement run by people's donations. We did not take corporate or project-based funding from any international organisation. We are not even registered. So we can't take funding.

There are a lot of volunteers and, for your information, there are 4 full-time volunteers who get a (nominal) salary... The monthly expenses for the Parivartan office (in 2009) come to around ₹ 30,000-40,000 for everything – the electricity, rent, etc.

‘On Don't Pay Bribe’ campaign (2006)

AK: We had so many stories from across the country – how, for example, when the RTI was filled, a job was completed in four days,

etc. That was one experience for us which was quite an eye- opener as, when we said we don't take money, a lot of people asked how we would scale up, and one thing that also became clear was that money was not a bad thing. It depends where you are using that money and for what purpose. If you are building a hospital, if you are doing charity then obviously you would need money to build the hospital, you need money to give medicines to the people – there donations are required.

But in a movement, you basically want people to participate and when you want people to participate, money can actually become a hindrance. For instance, when we went to several cities and met with several NGOs, the first question the NGOs would ask was, "Where will the money come from?" Our response was that we don't have money, this is your city and your country, you can participate if you want and if you don't want to, we will not force you to join. So people got together, they collected their own money – we did not give any money.

When we went to media houses, they gave us free advertisements but suppose those media houses had known that we had a budget of ₹ 40 lakh with us, they would have told us what their ad rates were and they would have told us that they can give a 15% discount. We told them the same thing, you can help us or not – it's your choice.

So one day, we were calculating – so many cities, so many people, so many volunteers, and it would have easily exceeded ₹ 15 crore – the cost of the campaign, that is, but we spent only ₹ 80,000 from our pocket. So, if you want to bring about a movement of people, then money will be the biggest hindrance. Money and time should come from the people. The only thing was that we ensured that we were ourselves completely in the background. It was everyone's campaign.

On the RTI Movement

AK: I think it has gained momentum but there is a big question about RTI, that if you file RTI, you would expose corruption. But sometimes the government does not take any action. You get all the documents and still there is no response.

All this has been a learning experience for me. In the beginning with the vigilance campaign, we thought that corruption is a problem but now we know that corruption is only a symptom and that the problem is that we don't have any control on the system. A common man in

this country has absolutely no control. The day we start having control, things would improve.

The Case for Swaraj or True Democracy

(This portion is reproduced in full)

AK: We realised one thing, that wherever you go, you would have various problems but that most problems related to governance. Some places don't have water or electricity, some places have damaged roads. If you were to keep struggling with each of these issues, there would be no end to it. You have to identify that common thread going through all these problems which when tackled, would solve all these problems.

That's because we don't have a democracy, what we have is a farce in the name of democracy. We go out and vote once in 5 years and then you plead with the same set of people, whom you voted to power. And in the next 5 years, you have absolutely no say in governance. I mean, no one asks you your opinion. So this cannot be a democracy. This one question led us to do some research for the last 2 years at PCRF (Public Cause Research Foundation) – what type of governance system do other countries have? What type of governance systems existed in ancient or medieval India?

And what comes out is quite fantastic. The first being that we say democracy is a modern concept, but it isn't a modern concept. Democracy has existed in India since Buddha's time. Vaishali was the first republic city of the world and when I say republic, immediately, the first thing that comes to your mind is elections.

Elections are not democracy. We have equated elections with democracy. Elections are the beginning of democracy. In Buddha's time, in Vaishali, there were no elections. King's sons became the next kings but these kings had no say, almost all decisions were taken in public meetings. There are certain interesting stories that we have come across. That type of governance continued until the 1860 and our country was attacked several times by various people – those people controlled the central governance. They did not control the local level. At the local or village level, it was still run by the people.

The whole village would sit together and take decisions about everything – what kind of commerce could be done, etc. In 1830, Lord

Macaulay, the acting governor-general at that time, wrote that the foundation of the country was in the village governance. In 1840, Lord Macaulay wrote that if we have to win this country, we need to demolish this system. In 1860, he brought in a law where they introduced the collector system. So all the powers that the people enjoyed earlier, were invested in the collector now. So earlier, the people would decide their education systems and now the collectors would decide.

Each part of a person's life was departmentalised: education department, health department, old-age department, etc, and all these powers were vested in a British officer called a collector. Unfortunately, at the time of Independence, we did not change the system. We just replaced the British collector with an Indian collector and we are carrying on with the same system until now.

When you study other countries, in the US, for instance, at the local or county level or town level, all the decisions are taken by the public. You have regular town hall meetings where the participation of the people may be low but you get an opportunity to come and participate. People can hold their officers and elected representatives responsible and some places when you check the websites, they even have weekly meetings. For example, every week at 5 pm on a certain day, there would be a town hall meeting and you get to decide on things which affect you.

I was in the US and found that it was quite common to get a notice to come and attend these meetings. Now they may use emails but in many places, hard copies are also sent out to the residents that these are the decisions to be made, would you like to have your say in the matter. I don't think we ask these things anywhere in our country. Now this is how democracy works. We don't believe in a democracy which is once in 5 years. We want a democracy where we can participate in the decision-making on a day-to-day basis. So philosophically and theoretically, there are too many ideas. I don't think this is rocket science, as I said earlier, this has existed since Buddha's time.

Should water privatisation happen in Delhi or not? When we met Sheila Dixit, she said that the people want water privatisation. But people don't seem to actually want it. So who decides whether the

people want it or not? Delhi should be taken street by street and people should meet on a weekly basis and decide whether they want water privatisation or not. We need to educate them that they have a choice. We should ask them and then draw a conclusion whether Delhi wants water privatisation or not. Likewise, in Singur, should we have the Tata plant or not? The people should decide, not some outsiders. Who is the Chief Minister to decide or who are activists to decide? The people from that area should decide and if they want it also, they should decide on what terms and conditions. So this is the kind of democracy we envision, we call it Swaraj. This is what Gandhiji talked about, that this country would be a federation of 6 lakh villages.

Unfortunately, we had a partition of 28 states. But what he wanted was that every village would be a republic unto itself. Now republic is a big word, it means that the people take all the decisions. What cannot be decided at the village level would go up and what cannot be decided at that level would go further up. So that is what we are working on these days, more than RTI, we are working on Swaraj.

On the mohalla sabha experiment in Delhi

AK: The results have been fantastic. In terms of people now have a voice. If you come to the meetings, you would see that sometimes a project gets sanctioned on the spot. It has also been an eye-opener for the councillors. In Sundarnagari, when this was started, in one of the meetings, the municipal councillor was not sure what he could do in the budget allocated to him. A civil engineer asked what was to be done, so someone jokingly said that they wanted the area to have roads and the civil engineer replied that he could finish that work in the councillor's budget. The councillor was amazed.

Sometimes, the politicians are also helpless. Leave ministers aside, these MPs and MLAs are also helpless. They do not have any executive power; they can only go to the parliament and shout or scream. Even their eyes have been opened. Now they are slowly staring to reveal the budgets. So the people tell what work they want and that work gets done. In Trilokpuri, all roads were laid in a ₹ 1 crore project and this was decided in one meeting.

The people are monitoring everything. At first when we started this, we thought the demands would exceed the budget so we may run out of

funds. So we decided that we will write down all the requests whatever cost it may be and then decide how much to allocate the funds. These days we don't have a problem with that as people's demands are very few. So all their demands can actually be met in ₹ 10, ₹ 12 or ₹ 14 lakh. So people's demands are very few but the government seems to be spending crores and crores on useless things.

Thirdly, we also wanted to ensure that the beneficiary programs reached the poor people. ₹ 1000 is a lot of money for these people. So we ask them whoever wants ₹ 1000 raise your hands to let us know if you are poor. At one meeting, there were 200 people but they all pointed at one woman and said she is the poorest, give her the money. At another meeting with 100 people – this was a village in a poor part of Delhi – all 100 people got together and gave the names of seven women and asked us to give the money to those seven women. The councillor said he had a quota to give this to 50 people so give me more names. However, not many people asked for it as it takes courage to stand in front of a crowd and declare that you are poor, *sabko apni izzat pyaari hai* (it's a matter of dignity). Only the very desperate would ask for the money, others would say that they were not in need of charity as their pride was more worthy than the money.

Our ultimate dream is that the whole of Delhi would be set up this way. On that day, the people in each area would decide what laws should be passed. If a law is passed by the *mohalla sabha*, then it should be followed no matter whether the BJP is in power or Congress. It would become a huge political issue. Then we can press for a law which institutionalises the areas. That is our dream.

On resistance from politicians

AK: What we are doing is two-fold, we talk to the councillors and tell them that they would have more political expression if they were to implement this, so we prepare the councillors and they prepare the citizens... We also go door-to-door talking and meeting with people.

Right, so earlier what we had was not democracy, it was hypocrisy. Now if we were to meet them (voters) once in 5 years, they would not remember your face but when you organise a weekly meeting, the people identify with you. When a vote is to be taken, they would remember you. You do not need campaign as everyone would give

their vote to you. And if you are to be voted, then that would be the end of corruption, so the councillors are stuck.

... This has not yet had a significant impact. It has only made a local impact. The day 30 or 40 councillors are ready to implement this; there would be a change in the areas. What type of changes, only time will tell us. We will see how stiffly people will resist negative changes after that.

Learnings over the last 10 years

AK: My learning is that the biggest problem that we have is that we are not a democracy. Some people want to work in education, or hospital or other fields; I ask that all people work toward making this a democracy. Everything else will fall into place. Otherwise we have the symptoms and are just working on one or two aspects like tinkering with a problem. Charity should be there but for those people who have the need. If the whole country were to run charity then it would not be economical. The government's solution is only to subsidise everything but that will not solve any problem. The country cannot run that way.

Effect on the family

AK: How does my wife feel about all this? I don't think she has a choice, that's it. No one has a choice in my family.

Initially, there was a lot of opposition. Now they have accepted it. And if you look at it from their perspective, it is not easy to take it. I mean, I resigned from my regular job and then started this, these are all shocks which I gave them.

I wasn't always clear (what I wanted to do). That's why I took 6 years to resign from my job. In November 2000, I took leave, and tried this and then, in February 2006, I kept taking leave... First it was two years of study leave then it was unpaid leave. Then it was some other leave. For two years, I got a salary and after that I did not get a salary.

On living in the IRS colony (Ghaziabad)

AK: My wife is in IRS.

Message to the youth / on corruption *(this portion was not published originally, as it was a general discussion)*

AK: The first and foremost thing is that you need to think. I have very educated people come to me and say that corruption is a problem.

Yes, corruption is a problem; don't just jump on that one point. Try to understand the anti-corruption systems we have in place in this country, can they work, etc. I will give you an example. At the central government level, you have the Central Vigilance Commission, the CVC, have you heard of them? That is the topmost body to deal with corruption in this country.

How does CVC operate? CVC is a building in INA Market with less than 200 officers. I filed an RTI application last year to them asking for a list of all the departments where you have jurisdiction and they did not have that list. So they do not even know in which departments they have the authority. It took me three months time to compile that list and finally, I had about 1500 departments – all 1500 departments in the country. In this, each department is so huge; the Income Tax department is so large. Excise is a large department, Railways is a large department. To handle such large departments and 1500 of them in number, how can we have less than 100 officers? Is it possible? It is not possible.

So how do they operate? Every department has an internal vigilance wing, like Income Tax has its own internal vigilance wing. Now the same officers who are posted in the internal vigilance department may also be posted in the CVC so the same set of officers is rotated. Now if I am a commissioner and I receive a complaint against a chief commissioner, can I follow up on that complaint? I can't because tomorrow I may get posted under this guy. So what do I do? I take this complaint to the chief commissioner saying that don't worry sir, a complaint has been logged against you but I will take care of it. All I ask is that tomorrow when I report to you, to give me a good posting. This would not help. Some departments have officers going to the vigilance team and coming back. So the existing officers double up. So I might end up investigating any complaint posted against me. And I am not joking; I can give you several instances. There's a guy in Railways, his boss made a complaint through the railway board chairman, he complained to the CVC. CVC's only job is to forward these complaints to the internal vigilance team. So the boss ending up investigating the complaints against himself.

This is how the vigilance department is today. This is the entire anti-

corruption system in our country.

RB: But this is very depressing.

AK: That's why the first thing I will say is to think. Understand everything about what you want to do. Take the Narmada river problem, 40,000 families were displaced because of the dam project. They had their lands there but did not get anything in return. We need to think of all these things. I am not saying that is right or that is wrong but we need to think.

Secondly, as we think that I am an individual and I have a family. Now we would do anything for that family. Now take for instance, last year July, when we have that 'cash for vote' scandal. MPs were sold. I thought that was the most shocking thing in the Indian democracy. I thought if they can purchase an MP then there is no value for my vote. Whoever I vote for is sold into a different constituency. So in time, different nations can also do this so there is no point in having a parliament too.

I have told many of my friends, "Let's go to India Gate and protest." I called several of my middle class friends. They replied that nothing would come out of it so there was no point in going. I felt that it was not necessary to get a result. But that if we kept quiet, then things would slide lower. At least some people would join in the protest and our voice would be heard. But when we go to see a movie, then do we ask, would there be any benefit in watching this movie? We don't as we just think we have to watch it for enjoyment and that is a must. Do we ask if we benefit from this – going for a movie with our children or wife?

So as we take responsibility for our families' welfare in the same way, we need to think about our country's welfare. We have to think and there is no other option, as a democracy cannot work without active participation of the people. Otherwise it will collapse and it is collapsing. In order for a democracy to work, we need to participate without thinking of the results or the benefits. I am not saying participate in anything, make your choices, but participate in something. I am not asking you to join Parivartan. You can join anything you want but just ensure that you participate in something.

On the 'Joy of Giving'

AK: I completely agree that as an individual and more at a spiritual level, you should give. And you should give not because the other person gets helped but because you get help. You cannot control the outcome of a situation.

For example, if you were to give an aam person ₹ 10, in fact, it is very interesting, that when you sit in a rickshaw, they may be the saddest people. If your fare was ₹ 10, and you gave him ₹ 100, just see how much joy would be there on his face. Even he may not be as happy as you are in giving him that joy. So at a spiritual level, I think that what you're saying is right that the joy you get out of giving that ₹ 100 is more than the value you may get out of ₹ 1000.

Secondly, the manner in which we give something has now become degraded in our society. That needs to be refined. You cannot make money by hook or crook and then donate it. I don't agree with that. Do business, earn money, loot people and swindle them and then donate a bit to justify your action. That's not right. So you should run your business in an ethical way. This so-called corporate or social responsibility seems the most bogus to me. So do your business well and that does not mean just ensure that it is correct in the eyes of the law as sometimes those are also exploited. The sense of justice is not just being in the four corners of the law but much beyond that. You know there is a nice saying that before doing charity, think why it was necessary first. What are the systems operating in our society which forced you to make that charity? We should change that and if we, educated people, cannot do that then who can? These educated people look for an easy way to salvation for their souls; they earn a lakh or two and send ₹ 5000 to CRY. People should start saying that we do not need your money, we need your time. Give your intelligence, give your time. Participate anywhere for any cause but participate intelligently.

RB: The work Parivartan is doing... is really required in Mumbai.

AK: So why don't you start it there?

RB: I think I can inspire more people as a writer than as an activist.

AK: Think of writing a book on RTI activists.

RB: Yes, I will consider it...

AK: So in case you find it exciting and you are willing to take it up next

month, then do let me know...

(I got busy with other things and it did not happen)

Aam aadmi ‘research’

AK: If you were travelling in a bus, what kind of a pamphlet would inspire you to join this Swaraj? We have been discussing it and debating it and we would like to know what type of a pamphlet would appeal to you because with Swaraj, it has a different meaning for different people. You are a very ordinary person, you do not bother at all about the country but your street would be important to you, your rations, and your electricity.

RB: Yes, I would support that.

AK: No, but some people don’t get inspired by that.

RB: Only a few people get inspired by anything.

AK: You are right, you cannot inspire everyone but you can get a few people in each community to mobilise the others. So that would help.

Aam aadmi Arvind

AK: I’m happy doing what I am doing. I don’t have goals that I need to achieve this or that. You should enjoy the journey, which is what is most important. If you don’t enjoy the journey, then you had it. So I enjoy whatever I do. The good thing is that as this is your own work, it gives you the freedom and the space to do whatever you want. You can change your strategy tomorrow; you can do whatever you want. A regular 9 to 5 job does not give you that freedom. You can only do what your boss asks you to do. Even your business does not give you that freedom. But this field gives you a lot of freedom to try out your strategy.

After the interview

Arvind asked where I was headed. I said I have a cab and was going towards South Delhi.

“I don’t have a car – do you mind dropping me on the way?” Spoken like a true aam aadmi indeed.